



Promising Assessment Models and Practices

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The primary intended audience for this document is:

Administrators	✓
Counsellors	✓
General Audience	
Partners	
Students	
Teachers	✓

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INTRODUCTION

Collaboration and sharing of information between and among schools and jurisdictions is important and enhances the assessment practices of those involved. The purpose of this monograph is to provide information about selected assessment models and promising practices and to encourage the future sharing of information throughout Alberta schools.

This monograph presents promising assessment models and practices developed and currently being used in Alberta, some in response to financial constraints relating to the identification, assessment and programming of all students, including those with special needs. Assessment models which are efficient and effective in Alberta appear to have several common characteristics.

Common Characteristics of Effective Assessment Models

- an assessment process which moves from informal, school-based assessment toward formal assessment by qualified specialists
- school-based teams with well-defined purposes, and members who serve as resources to teachers
- a referral process which incorporates consultation
- availability and use of specialists, such as psychologists and reading consultants
- identified levels of assessment to ensure both that the skills of all school personnel are utilized and that certain instruments are restricted to use by qualified specialists
- a focus on broad-based assessment (multiple sources of information, a variety of instruments)

continued

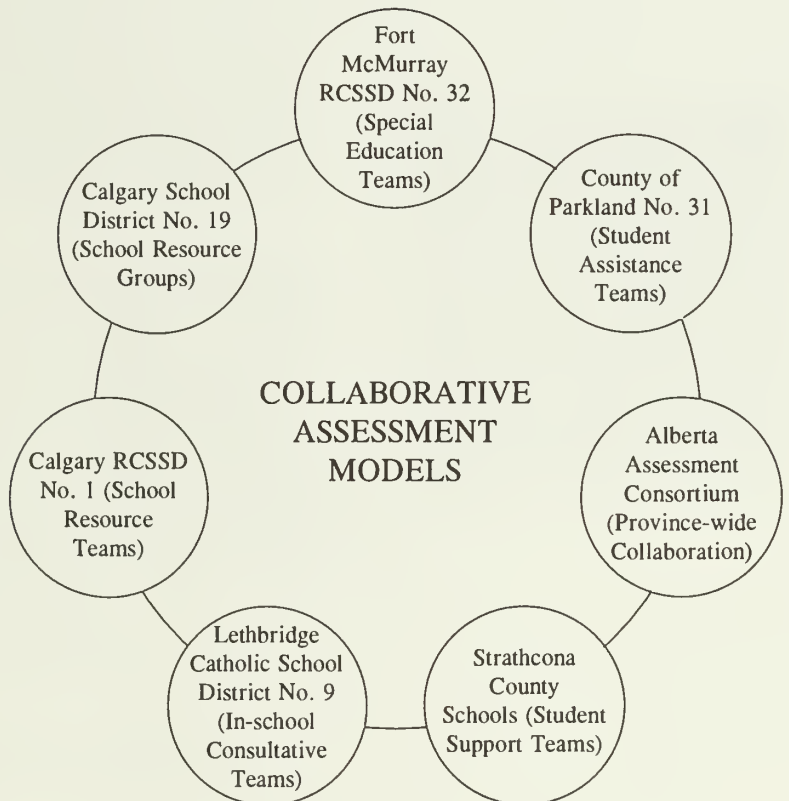
- involvement of parents in the entire process (consultation, programming, referral, team meetings, assessment)
- written consent always obtained from parents prior to psycho-educational assessment
- thorough documentation at every stage of the assessment process for student record portfolios
- case conferences involving school personnel, parents and the testor to discuss assessment results
- assessments focus on abilities and needs that contribute directly to a student's learning
- a thorough classroom reporting process which informs parents of their child's progress and learning
- creativity in developing and using new evaluation and assessment techniques
- a sharing of information relating to new evaluation and assessment practices among professionals, jurisdictions and Alberta Education.

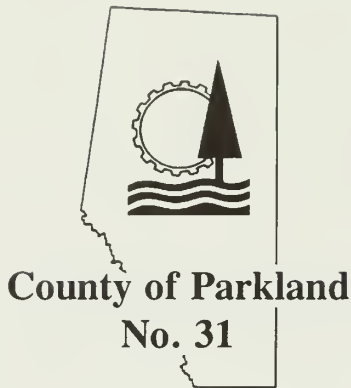
In addition, selected resources on promising school assessment practices outside of Alberta are annotated in the appendix.



PART I: COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT MODELS

Assessment models in several jurisdictions are becoming more collaborative and process oriented. Collaborative assessment models use the diverse strengths and areas of expertise of school personnel by viewing assessment as a process. The assessment models described in this section illustrate how collaboration is utilized in different Alberta school jurisdictions.





Highlights:

- responding to financial constraint
- student assistance teams
- a thorough pre-assessment work up
- using consultation with specialists.

The County of Parkland No. 31 consists of 21 schools educating approximately 9000 students. Prior to the 1993-94 school year, the Student Services Department was responsible for providing assessment services, determining eligibility for special education programs, recommending program support to classroom teachers and assisting with programming of integrated special needs students. The Student Services Department consisted of two administrators and three psycho-educational specialists. Referrals for assessment were made to the Student Services Department, and following assessment, case conferences were held to discuss results. The county experienced an increasing number of requests for assessments, resulting in longer time periods between referral and assessment.

In response to financial constraints, assessment services were decentralized and the specialists reassigned to schools. The Student Services Department now consists of two administrators. **Their goal is to reduce the number of requests for individual assessments by helping schools become more independent by using their own resources.** Qualified school-based specialists are provided with substitute teacher release time for assessments conducted in other schools within the system.

Schools are encouraged to develop school-based student assistance teams to provide first-line intervention for teacher concerns. Responsibilities of student assistance teams include gathering information, screening, developing interim Individualized Program Plans (IPPs) and implementing some strategies. Consultation from Student Services at central office is available during this stage. School personnel receive inservice training in the use of screening and achievement assessment instruments. Prior to referring students for assessment at Student Services, the following steps are completed:

- the problem is discussed at the school level with the student assistance team
- the student's cumulative file is examined for previous assessment information, standardized test results, anecdotal information, etc.

- an interim IPP is drafted
- strategies to address the concerns are implemented and documented for a reasonable time (four to six weeks)
- Student Services and other resources are accessed
- parents are informed and involved in the intervention and referral process.

A thorough referral form was developed which ensures that the psycho-educational specialist is provided with as much background information as possible, which lessens the amount of time spent gathering information.

Three levels of assessment are being developed which ensure utilization of the skills, experiences and expertise of all school personnel. Tests in Level A do not require any special training and are generally group-administered achievement tests. Level B tests, which generally examine academic skills, require training and are administered by selected school personnel. Level C tests include psychological and personality instruments, as well as individual reading assessment instruments, and are administered by appropriately qualified specialists.



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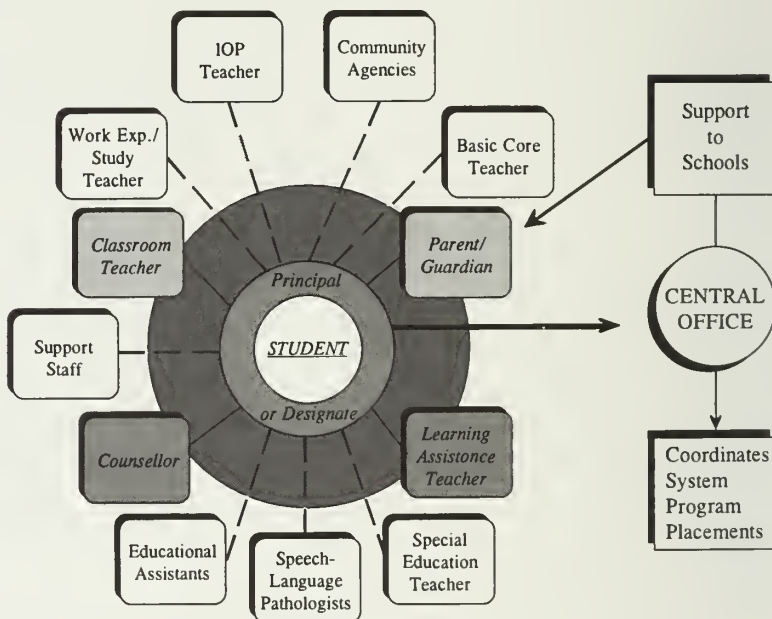


Strathcona County Schools is Alberta's fifth largest school system and provides educational services to about 13000 students in 28 schools. Each school has a school-based counsellor, 12 of whom are chartered psychologists. Schools use a student support team model wherein school-based teams are formed to address the individual needs of students. Members of the student support team may include administrators, special education teachers, teachers, counsellors, parents, students, education assistants, speech pathologists and outside agencies, depending on the needs of particular students. School-based student support teams may request the involvement of specialists from the jurisdiction's central office, and are able to call on the expertise of others when necessary. Specialists in areas of behaviour, special education, learning disabilities and curriculum are among district staff.

Highlights:

- student support teams
- use of specialists
- school-based counsellors.

Student Support Team



School-Based Decision-Making Model

LEGEND

- All schools
- - - Varies by school/need
- Designate determined by principal

◦ Strathcona County Schools
Sherwood Park, Alberta
1990

Parental permission is always obtained prior to assessment. Assessment results are discussed in case conferences involving the student support team and parents. Psycho-educational assessments are used in conjunction with other information to meet the programming needs of students. These assessments are administered by appropriately qualified school-based counsellors. Parents are involved in the development of Individual Program Plans.



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Lethbridge Catholic School District No. 9

Highlights:

- in-school consultative teams
- a structured outline for teams.

Lethbridge Catholic School District No. 9 consists of nine schools and approximately 3000 students. Each school uses a consultative team approach in developing individual programs. The in-school consultative team provides assistance to classroom teachers with respect to programming. One team member can be external to the school if there is such a need.

In-school consultative teams follow these steps:

- a. the classroom teacher requests assistance
- b. the team reviews the request within one week, and may visit the classroom
- c. a problem-solving meeting is held, involving the team and the referring teacher, in order to brainstorm concerns and devise solutions. The referring teacher selects solutions to implement
- d. the team completes an action plan which is implemented by the teacher
- e. a follow-up meeting is held two weeks later to discuss the results of the plan. If the problem has not been solved, the process is repeated and additional resource persons may be added to the team.

Formal assessment may be requested as part of this process if it could provide new information or be beneficial in program development. Various standardized tests are used in an effort to determine areas of strength and weakness. Involvement of parents and students (when appropriate) is sought throughout this process.

An overview of in-school consultative teams was developed which describes the process as a whole, summarizes steps in team meetings and provides forms.



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Calgary RCSSD No. 1

Calgary RCSSD No. 1 includes 74 schools and approximately 30000 students. A team model is used in all elementary schools, and teams are being increasingly implemented in junior and senior high schools. School resource teams are school-based groups of “teachers helping teachers” program for the individual needs of their students. They are based on the belief that teachers can help their colleagues clarify concerns about students and suggest practical programming strategies.

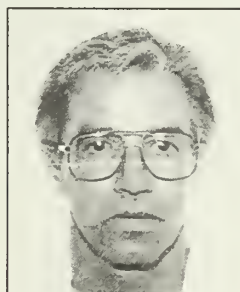
School resource teams have regularly scheduled meeting times. Teachers consult with the team when requiring assistance with particular students with the goal of enhancing student success. Parental involvement on the school resource team (for their child) is encouraged. Each case is documented and a record is placed in the student record portfolio describing team members, the presenting concerns, suggested strategies and follow-up. School-based assessments may be conducted as part of this process. Curriculum-based assessment methods are increasingly being used over standardized academic tests.

Highlights:

- school resource teams
- teachers helping teachers
- pre-special-education program
- use of specialists.

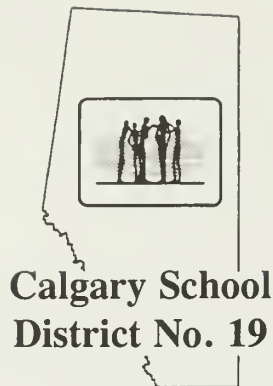
Significant attempts are made to help students prior to formal assessment. When school resource team recommendations are not successful, a referral to district consultants is made for consultation, and formal assessment may subsequently be arranged (with parental consent). An interpretation of assessment results is provided to parents and school personnel involved with the student. Assessment results are used to address problems that have not been resolved by the school resource team.

Calgary RCSSD No. 1 has a program called the elementary corrective learning teacher program, which can be described as a pre-special-education program. Students whose problems are quickly correctable receive assistance through this program. Students who require further assistance after attending this short-term program may be considered for special program placement.



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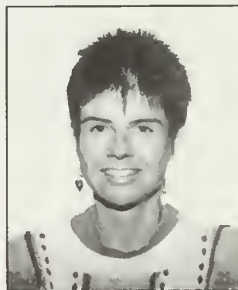


Highlights:

- use of specialists
- school resource groups
- collaborative decision making
- an assessment process.

Calgary School District No. 19 consists of 213 schools and over 96000 students. The Student Services Department supports schools in their efforts to meet the needs of exceptional learners. Program specialists in both learning and behaviour assist schools through their school resource groups (SRG) as they assess the strengths and needs of students and develop appropriate programs. School psychologists may be accessed through Student Services to provide yet another perspective on the child.

Each school has developed a school resource group to meet its own unique needs. Membership of the SRG is flexible, but most often includes representation from school administration, resource staff, classroom teachers and parents. When support is required from outside the school, program specialists and psychologists may be invited to join the SRG. Through joint problem solving and decision making, the SRG combines the creative energies of its members to address concerns of teachers and/or parents as they relate to individual student needs. Assessment of these needs begins with the classroom teacher within the classroom context. Assistance may be requested of the resource teacher, who may observe the student within the classroom, work with the student individually, and informally or more formally assess the student. A school psychologist may be consulted in situations where psychological assessment appears warranted. Information is shared with the SRG, and decisions are made collaboratively. Critical to the success of the school resource group process is the focus on supporting the classroom teacher in meeting the needs of students.



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Fort McMurray RCSSD No. 32

Highlights:

- special education teams
- parental involvement
- collaborative assessment
- use of specialists.

Fort McMurray RCSSD No. 32 consists of nine schools and approximately 3700 students. When students are experiencing ongoing difficulty, teachers initiate the referral process through school-based special education teams. The team consists of the principal, classroom support teacher, counsellor, classroom teacher and others as needed. If assessment seems warranted, parents are interviewed to determine their perspectives, get a developmental history, describe the assessment process and obtain consent. Team assessments are often conducted. As part of this collaboration, teachers complete educational assessments, including observations and informal and formal measures. The psychologist completes the intellectual assessment and then integrates the results from all team members in a written report. Results are discussed with the special education team and parents, and Individual Program Plans are developed or revised with parental involvement.



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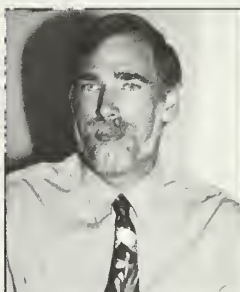


The Alberta Assessment Consortium is a cooperative effort among 21 school jurisdictions, the Alberta Teachers' Association and Alberta Education that officially began in November 1993. New school jurisdictions are welcome to join. The consortium was formed under the belief that classroom teachers need a comprehensive set of quality strategies and instruments designed to assess student performance in relation to learning expectations. These provide a means of assessing student growth, identifying needs and strengths and monitoring program effectiveness. Specific purposes of the consortium include:

- developing a broad range of high-quality assessment strategies and materials that are focused on student learning, based on research, based on curriculum and are by teachers for teachers
- providing opportunities for teacher development regarding classroom assessment
- providing an opportunity for consortium members to share assessment knowledge, skills and expertise through a collaborative effort
- establishing liaisons with other agencies.

Highlights:

- collaboration of school jurisdictions on assessment and evaluation.



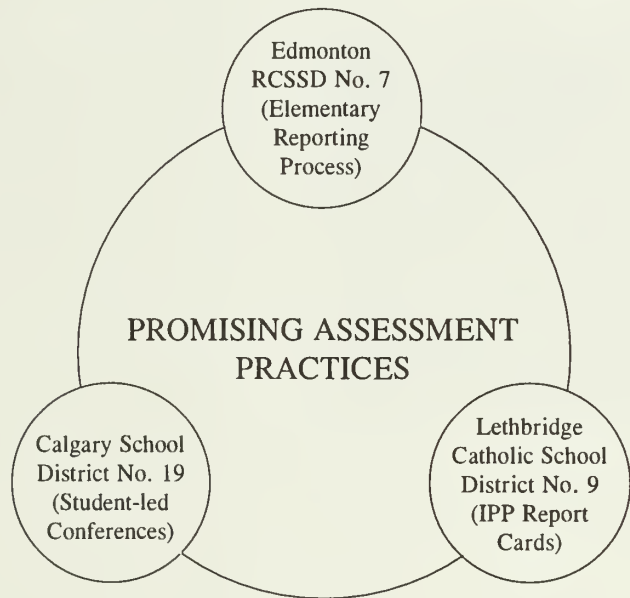
For more information,
or to obtain the Alberta
Assessment Consortium
1993-94 Handbook,
contact Doug Knight.

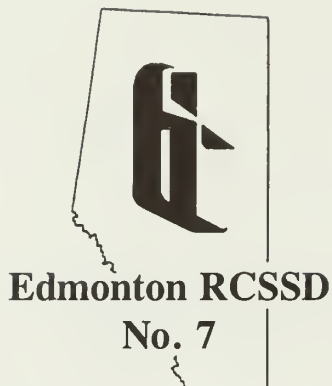
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PART II: PROMISING ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Innovative assessment and evaluation techniques are being developed and refined throughout the education field. In the search for curriculum-guided assessment and evaluation for all students, certain practices are emerging as particularly useful for students with special needs. Following are selected promising assessment practices being developed, refined and used in Alberta.





Edmonton RCSSD No. 7 has established several promising assessment practices. While those described here are used with all students, they can also be used specifically with students on modified programs.

The elementary reporting process is designed to inform parents about their child's progress by focusing on the learning that has occurred. The process begins when teachers complete report cards and send them home, approximately two weeks prior to parent-teacher-student interviews. The report card identifies each subject and provides descriptions of the learning focuses in the reporting period. In several classrooms, teachers have students complete descriptive report cards assessing themselves to promote student involvement in this process. Teachers then organize an open house to which parents and their children are invited. Teachers and students create centres and accompanying booklets designed to allow students to demonstrate their learning during the open house. A student might, for example, take his/her parents to the math centre, where the accompanying booklet invites students to do any of a number of operations to demonstrate to their parents what they have learned. After parents and students have visited the centres, they confer with the teacher. In the conference, the teacher presents the student's portfolio and invites the student to explain its contents. After reviewing the portfolio, parents have an opportunity to ask questions. The conference focuses on how well the student is progressing, and ends with the participants determining a plan indicating where the student will focus during the next reporting period.

Highlights:

- elementary reporting process
- curriculum-based assessment
- benchmarks of achievement
- involving students in evaluation.

A current goal of Edmonton RCSSD No. 7 is the alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment and reporting within schools. This requires teachers to identify significant goals of the unit, and then step backwards to plan a unit ensuring achievement of these learning goals. An assessment rubric, described later, must be developed to distinguish criteria associated with various levels of achievement.

These criteria are developed and shared with students when activities are first introduced. Another goal of Edmonton RCSSD No. 7 is to establish a benchmarks program to help teachers develop a sense of what achievement looks like at every level. This involves forming guidelines, assessment goals, examples of achievement and definitions of criteria to indicate achievement expected at different levels. The focus in evaluating students is on involving students in the evaluation process, as research indicates that considerable gains in learning are associated with this. Stemming from these various goals, specific practices are used:

Portfolios

Portfolios are widely used to demonstrate the achievement of students in parent-teacher-student conferences. While portfolios are not used to assess students, they provide a means of tracking growth and demonstrating learning and achievement.

Rubrics

A rubric describes criteria that determine achievement and that distinguish between various levels of achievement. Rubrics are developed by teachers and students together when activities are assigned, so students are aware of the basic criteria and know what differentiates different levels of achievement. Students who experience difficulty are more successful with activities when expectations are well-defined.

Blueprinting Tests

At the start of the unit, the teacher decides the number of questions that will address each learning component of the unit, and “blueprints” the test. The teacher shares this information with students to encourage organized learning. Students are learning to focus their studying, to organize as they learn and to monitor their own understanding of important concepts within a unit.

Student-led Conferences

Students lead the conference by talking about and demonstrating their learning.

A resource on evaluation and assessment at the elementary level, entitled *Growth Through Evaluation*, has been developed by Edmonton RCSSD No. 7. The information in this book was presented as part of an inservice package when it was introduced in 1990. Every elementary school teacher is provided with a copy. It is now under revision to accommodate changes in their evaluation practices.



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Lethbridge Catholic School District No. 9

Highlights:

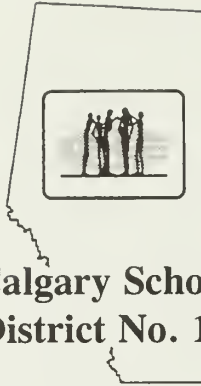
- evaluating students with Individual Program Plans
- anecdotal reports.

Lethbridge Catholic School District No. 9 totally integrates all special needs students in their schools. An evaluation and reporting process was developed which enables teachers to evaluate progress of students with Individual Program Plans and which helps parents know more precisely what their child has learned. Students receive report card marks based on how well goals in their Individual Program Plans have been met. Portfolios are used to demonstrate how well goals are being met. Anecdotal reports are used in some schools where teachers describe the progress, learning and difficulties of particular students. This allows parents to be informed of what their child's Individual Program Plan specifically involves and to receive regular updates on their child's progress from every teacher.



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Calgary School District No. 19

Highlights:

- student-led conferences.

Portfolios are collections of student work which portray the learner's efforts and self-assessment of achievement and progress. Student-led conferences are used as a natural extension of portfolios. They provide an opportunity for each student to give voice to personal accomplishments and areas of learning needs and to set goals. When parents and teachers listen to student voices and respect what they know about their own learning strengths and needs, students are more likely to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning. When students plan for conferences about their own learning and know their voices are heard during student-led conferences, they tend to take responsibility for collaboratively planning goals with parents and teachers for future learning.



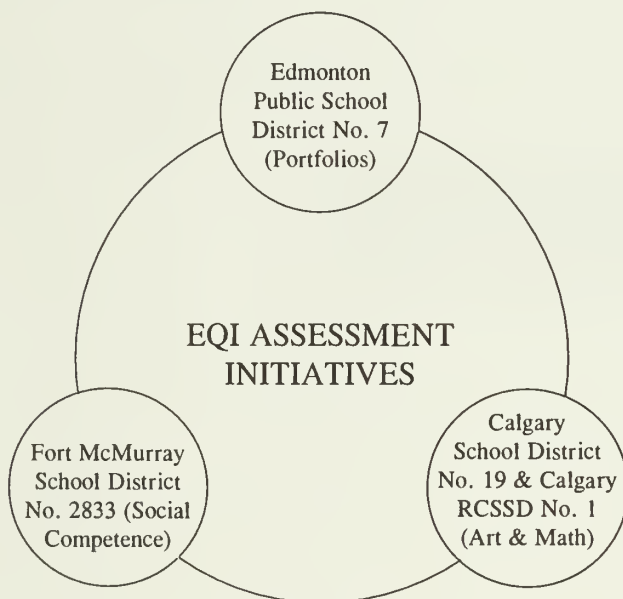
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PART III: EQI ASSESSMENT INITIATIVES

The Educational Quality Indicators (EQI) initiative was a three-year collaboration between Alberta Education and 12 school jurisdictions in which collaborative research projects were completed. The projects focused on different aspects of education, one being alternative student assessment strategies. The following are selected from an array of good assessment practices that have been developed through the Educational Quality Indicators initiative.





Edmonton Public School District No. 7

Edmonton Public School District No. 7 was involved in the EQI initiative between 1989 and 1992, and was involved in the development of portfolios. A student portfolio was defined as a purposeful collection of student work demonstrating the student's achievement, growth and performance in selected areas of learning. The portfolio includes criteria for selecting contents, achievement criteria, reflections of the student and teacher descriptions of the context in which the contents were obtained. Nine performance assessment tasks were developed to assess student achievement and growth. Student work is evaluated against grade-level-achievement criteria with respect to communication, inquiry, responsible citizenship, well-being, knowledge and aesthetic appreciation. Students are involved in selecting work to place in their portfolios. The contents of the portfolio indicate the quality of work that can be expected of the child and demonstrate progress. While portfolios are valuable for all students, they may be particularly useful for demonstrating the strengths, achievement and growth of students experiencing difficulty.

Through portfolios,

STUDENTS have:

- a collection of products indicating their growth
- evidence to show others what they know and can do
- information for goal setting.

TEACHERS have:

- a profile of a student's growth history
- models of achievement
- standard tasks and grade-level criteria for making evaluations
- material for communicating student learning and growth.

DISTRICT STAFF have:

- common grade-level criteria for making judgments about student achievement
- exemplars of student work at all grade levels.

Highlights:

- portfolios.

PARENTS have:

- information about their child's achievement over time
- concrete products and scoring criteria to use in evaluating the appropriateness of their child's programming.



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**Cooperative Project:
Calgary School
District No. 19 and
Calgary RCSSD No. 1**

Highlights:

- art compositions
- mathematical problem solving.

Both Calgary school districts were involved in the EQI initiative between 1989 and 1992, and developed indicators of quality work that could be used to assess art compositions and mathematical problem solving.

The art project resulted in the identification of three observable characteristics to consider when evaluating student art work: relationships, handling and meaning. The *Educational Quality Indicators Handbook* provides samples of quality work at different levels. It was found that quality evaluation of student art work encouraged improved art work in the future.

The math project examined the process of mathematical problem solving. Different response criteria were evaluated (preliminary, partial, complete and elegant responses) as a means to holistic scoring of diverse responses to math problems. Students seemed more positive about problem solving, took more risks and demonstrated increased confidence as a result of this project.

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**Fort McMurray
School District
No. 2833**

Highlights:

- social competence development.

Fort McMurray School District No. 2833 was involved in the EQI initiative between 1989 and 1992 and developed a three-level approach to assessing and reporting development of social competence within the school environment.

Level One: Teachers rate students' social competence as well-developed, developing appropriately or needing further development. This information is shared with parents at report card time.

Level Two: If a more detailed assessment is desired, the Social Skills Diagnostic Screen is completed. This checklist was developed by the district and can form a basis for discussion or guide development of a moderate remedial program. The Social Skills Diagnostic Screen evaluates four areas — personal factors, interpersonal factors, social reasoning skills and classroom behaviours.

Level Three: If more detailed knowledge is required, the case is referred to the counsellor for further assessment and development of an Individual Program Plan related to appropriate and acceptable social behaviour. District consultants have trained the counsellors in the use of specific instruments.

Fort McMurray School District No. 2833 produced the *Social Skills Development Activity Manual* as part of this project. The manual presents several activities that can be utilized in enhancing social skills development. Activities are cross-referenced to the many factors evaluated on the Social Skills Diagnostic Screen.

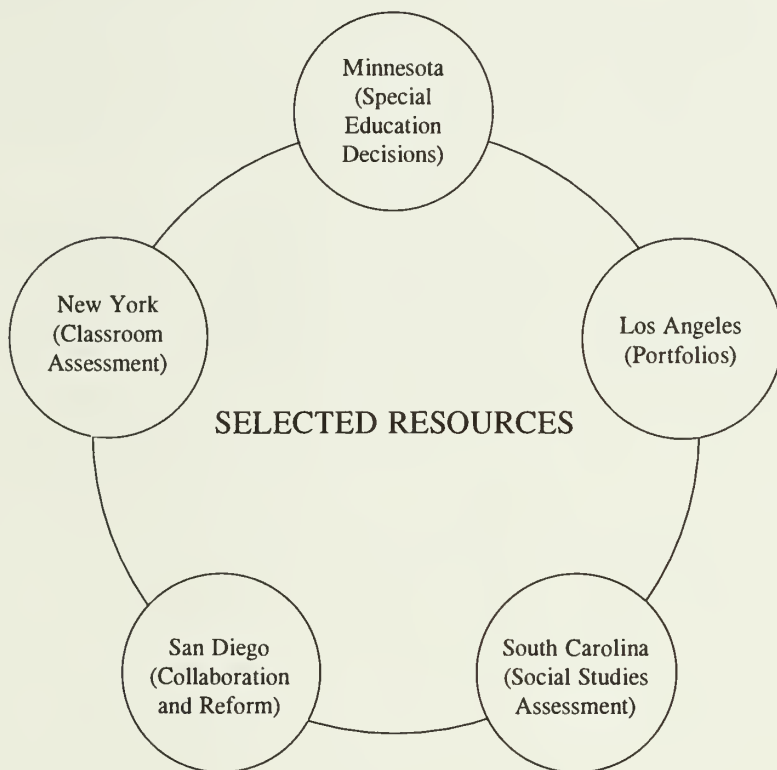


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APPENDIX — Annotated Selected Resources on School Assessment Practices Outside Alberta

The following articles provide some information about assessment models and practices implemented outside Alberta. The complete articles can be obtained from a university/college library or from the Special Education Branch, Alberta Education, 6240 – 113 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T6H 3L2.



Tindal, G. et al. *A data-based special education delivery system: The Pine County Model*. Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, Houston, TX, 1982.

In Pine County, Minnesota, the special education system has developed a measurement system to assist with assessing and programming for students with learning and behaviour problems. The measurement system addresses academic skills

(reading, spelling, written expression, math) and social behaviour (noise, wandering, physical contact, off task). The system assists with several structured decisions made in the process of developing an effective educational program: identification, initial assessment, eligibility determination, individualized education program (IEP) selection, IEP development, IEP implementation review and program review. Each of these decision areas is described thoroughly and examples are provided. Student support teams (consisting of the principal, psychologist, classroom teacher and special education teacher) review data and collaboratively make decisions. Sample forms which are used throughout this process are included.

Cox, K. *Portfolios in action: A study of two classrooms with implications for reform*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA, 1993.

A field study was conducted to explore the impact of writing portfolio assessment on classroom assessment practices in two Los Angeles language arts classrooms and to “provide a snapshot of portfolio assessment in practice.” Information gained from classroom observations, interviews, examination of portfolios (with student reflections and teacher comments) and student compositions about portfolios is presented. While portfolios in these classes met criteria, no impact on assessment practices was evident. The single significant criteria used to assess student portfolio work was whether assignments had been completed on time. Quality of work and evidence of student growth were apparently not considered in assessing portfolio work. The teachers expressed discomfort with portfolio assessment and students expressed favourable attitudes. The findings of this study suggest that even “expert instructors may lack the awareness, knowledge and skills needed to participate in professional assessment practices.”

Austen, C. et al. *Assessment of student learning in social studies*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA, 1993.

The focus of this paper is on assessing student learning in social studies. The goals of the South Carolina social studies curriculum are presented, along with a description of various instructional practices used in classrooms. Alternative methods of assessing social studies learning are described, including performance-based assessment, observation records, checklists, anecdotal records, portfolios, work samples and exhibits. Criteria for evaluating student work are included. Teachers report satisfaction with these assessment strategies and their effectiveness.

McDaid, J., D. Davis. *Program evaluation, curriculum, and testing services implement diverse forms of assessment in San Diego City Schools: A proposed collaboration model*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, 1991.

Collaboration among program evaluation, curriculum and classroom teachers is believed to foster reforms. A preliminary collaboration model between central office services and schools is presented, with the goal of implementing diverse forms of assessment. Teachers must be recognized as collaborators in the process of implementing different assessment practices. Teams consisting of central office staff and school personnel could address: program evaluation, testing services, curricular development, teacher flexibility in improving instruction and data collection. Through collaboration, assessment techniques which align with curriculum can be implemented and programs can be evaluated.

Chittenden, E., V. Wallace. Reforming school assessment practices: The case of Central Park East. *Planning and Changing*, 1991, 22, 3/4, pp. 141–146.

Central Park East is an alternative, child-centered school in New York where curriculum and instruction permit student strengths “to emerge and become focal points of learning.” Teachers are involved in classroom assessment as part of the learning process through keeping records, observing and collecting student work and conferring with students and families. Assessment practices have evolved and developed in two areas: teachers’ classroom practices of record keeping, documentation and evaluation; and school-wide practices. Each is described.



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